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PROBLEMS OF CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION IN CHARLES DICKENS' WORKS

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ANNOTATION

Charles Dickens, the eminent Victorian novelist, was a prolific chronicler of the social injustices and inequalities prevalent in 19th-century England. Central to his body of work were the problems of childhood poverty and the inadequacies of the educational system, themes that he explored with profound empathy and insight. Through the lens of his characters and narratives, Dickens illuminated the harsh realities faced by children growing up in poverty and the systemic barriers that hindered their access to quality education. This abstract delves into the nuanced portrayal of these issues in Dickens' novels, highlighting the societal injustices and individual struggles that he sought to expose and reform.

INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens, revered as one of the greatest novelists of the Victorian era, left an indelible mark on literature by exposing the social injustices and inequalities that plagued 19th-century England. Among the myriad themes explored in his extensive body of work, Dickens was particularly concerned with the problems of childhood poverty and the deficiencies of the educational system. Through his vivid characters, evocative settings, and intricate plotlines, Dickens painted a stark portrait

of the struggles faced by children growing up in impoverished circumstances and the barriers they encountered in their quest for education and self-improvement.

In this introduction, we will embark on a journey through the pages of Dickens' novels, delving into the multifaceted issues of childhood and education as depicted by the master storyteller. Dickens' exploration of these themes was not merely a literary exercise but a fervent call to action, aimed at shedding light on the societal injustices that perpetuated the cycle of poverty and ignorance among the most vulnerable members of society.

Throughout his works, Dickens employed a blend of realism, satire, and moral fervor to critique the prevailing social norms and institutions of his time. From the squalid streets of London to the idyllic countryside estates, Dickens' narratives provided a panoramic view of Victorian society, revealing the stark disparities between the privileged few and the downtrodden masses.

In the following sections, we will delve into the specific problems of childhood poverty and education as depicted in Dickens' novels, examining the societal conditions that gave rise to these issues, the individual experiences of his characters, and the overarching themes that resonate with contemporary audiences. Through our exploration, we aim to illuminate the enduring relevance of Dickens' social critique and its implications for understanding the challenges of childhood and education in both historical and modern contexts.

1. Childhood Poverty and Exploitation:

- Description: Dickens vividly portrays the harsh realities faced by children growing up in poverty, including hunger, homelessness, and exploitation.¹ Characters like Oliver Twist and David Copperfield endure neglect, abuse, and exploitation as they navigate the streets of Victorian London and the unforgiving world of workhouses and orphanages.

¹ Dickens, Charles. Letters of Charles Dickens, Pilgrim Edition. General editors: Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson. 12 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-2002.

- Examples: Oliver Twist being forced into child labor and subjected to abuse at the hands of the miserly Mr. Bumble and the criminal Fagin;¹ David Copperfield's experiences as a child laborer in a bottling factory and his struggles to survive on the streets after running away from his abusive stepfather.

2. Lack of Access to Education:

- Description: Dickens highlights the barriers preventing children, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, from accessing quality education.² Characters like Jo in "Bleak House" and Smike in "Nicholas Nickleby" are denied the opportunity to receive a proper education due to poverty, societal indifference, and the inadequacies of the educational system.

- Examples: Jo's inability to read or write due to his impoverished upbringing and his exclusion from the benefits of formal education; Smike's lack of education and his exploitation as a child laborer in the brutal conditions of Dotheboys Hall.

3. Exploitative and Abusive Educational Institutions:

- Description: Dickens exposes the abuses and moral corruption within Victorian educational institutions, particularly boarding schools and workhouses. Institutions like Dotheboys Hall in "Nicholas Nickleby" and Salem House in "David Copperfield" are depicted as oppressive environments where children suffer physical and emotional mistreatment at the hands of tyrannical educators.

- Examples: The brutal discipline and neglect endured by students at Dotheboys Hall under the tyrannical rule of Mr. Squeers; the deplorable conditions and abusive treatment of students at Salem House, where David Copperfield is sent after the death of his mother.

4. Redemption through Education:

- Description: Despite the challenges they face, Dickens' characters often find redemption and hope through education. Characters like Pip in "Great Expectations"

¹ Problems of education in the novel by Charles Dickens "The Adventures of Oliver Twist"« Biography of Ronald Reagan Biography Wilde Oscar»

² E. D. H. Johnson, Chronology of Novels (from Charles Dickens: An Introduction to His Novels 1969), Princeton University, retrieved 11 June 2007

and Esther Summerson in "Bleak House" rise above their disadvantaged backgrounds through self-improvement and the pursuit of knowledge, highlighting the transformative power of education in empowering individuals and fostering social mobility.

- Examples: Pip's journey from an illiterate orphan to a gentleman of means through the support of his benefactor, Mr. Jaggers, and his determination to educate himself; Esther Summerson's pursuit of education and self-improvement despite her humble origins and the challenges she faces along the way.

These classifications demonstrate how Dickens' works explore the multifaceted problems of childhood poverty and education, shedding light on the societal injustices and systemic failures that perpetuated the cycle of poverty and ignorance among Victorian children.

CONCLUSION

In Charles Dickens' novels, the problems of childhood poverty and education are depicted with unflinching realism and profound empathy. Through his vivid portrayals of impoverished children and the failings of the educational system, Dickens exposed the injustices and inequalities that plagued Victorian society. Yet, amidst the suffering and despair, Dickens also offered messages of resilience, compassion, and the transformative power of education. By shining a light on the problems of childhood and education, Dickens left an indelible mark on literature and social reform, inspiring generations to confront and address the pressing issues facing children and society as a whole.

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